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# H.R. 2698

## Veterans and Survivors Behavioral Health Awareness Act

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Significant issues remain with behavioral healthcare for our veterans and survivors. In the past, defense health care efforts have been broadly focused and designed to accommodate a large military at traditional military treatment facilities. Unfortunately, the nature of these conflicts is different and the signature wounds are more mental than physical.

Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress often lay dormant and may not appear until months or years after a servicemember has come home. And, increasingly, those serving are members of the National Guard and Reserve who leave service once they come home.

The Veterans and Survivors Behavioral Health Awareness Act is designed to update and expand behavioral health programs, grow the behavioral health work force and increase access to care.

Endorsed by the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), the Air Force Sergeants Association and Military Families United, this bill approaches the problem of behavioral health care in four key ways:

- ❖ Expands access for veterans by requiring the VA to provide referrals to those seeking mental health care outside the VA system;
- ❖ Provides grants to nonprofit organizations that provide peer-to-peer support services to survivors;
- ❖ Creates a scholarship-for-service program to help Vet Centers recruit and retain behavioral health specialists by requiring scholarship recipients to serve in Vet Centers;
- ❖ Requires the VA to advise vets of their rights to apply for a review of their discharge or release from service based upon a request for counseling;

**UPDATE:** Section III of the Veterans and Survivors Behavioral Health Awareness Act, which authorizes Vet Centers to issue referrals for local behavioral health providers, was included in the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act that was signed into law on May 5, 2010.